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# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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## EXSEQUITUR PRAECEPTA SIBYLLAE<sup>1</sup>

These words from Aeneid 6.236 preface the account of Aeneas's descent into the lower world. The conception of such a journey did not originate with Vergil. As the Sibyl and Aeneas remind us, a few demigods, Hercules, Theseus, Orpheus, Pollux, whom just Jupiter loved, had been able to descend to Avernus and to return to the upper air. Such myths merely give expression to a universal craving to pierce the mystery that surrounds the soul after death. The granting to a mortal of a glimpse of immortality invested him to a degree with superhuman attributes and marked him as a favorite of the gods.

So in the realm of the epic, Odysseus passed at Circe's command to the gloomy land of the Cimmerians, to the Ocean stream, to the kingdom of Hades and dread Persephone; he learned his fate from Tiresias, the Theban seer, and talked with his mother about Penelope and Telemachus, and saw a vision of fair women and brave men. We notice that Odysseus on his journey, though following supernatural instructions, passes unguided to the stream of Ocean. At Aeneas's side, however, walks the majestic figure of the Cumaean Sibyl and she does not leave him in Pluto's realm, but both together pass out of the ivory gate.

Why, then, did Vergil give to the Cumaean Sibyl so important a place in the passage of Aeneid 6 in which the prophecy of the greatness of the Julian line reaches its culmination?

Before considering this question directly it is necessary to call attention to the patent difference in purpose of the writer or writers of the Iliad and the Odyssey and that of the Aeneid. This is stated in the opening lines of each epic. The Iliad begins with *Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδῳ Ἀχιλλῆος*, the Odyssey with *Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα*, and the Aeneid with *Arma virumque cano*.

That is, in each case, the narrative is to center in an individual, a peculiar phase of whose life is suggested later by a modifier the meaning of which the poet proceeds to amplify. The wrath of Achilles was baneful and caused a thousand woes to the Greeks and sent down many souls of brave heroes to Hades in the accomplishment of the will of Zeus. The man

of the Odyssey was *πολύτροπος*, 'full of devices'. He saw many cities, knew the minds of many men, suffered countless woes, and witnessed the death of his companions e'er the day of return was his. So in the Aeneid is expanded the story of the exile by fate who endured, as a result of divine wrath, many woes till he should found his city. After the analogy of the Iliad and the Odyssey the theme should end here, but instead the significant words are added, *genus unde Latinum Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae*.

It is as though Vergil had said, 'In this epic I am following the example set in the Iliad and the Odyssey in narrating the adventures of a hero, but Aeneas is a hero who is interesting not only for his own sake, but also because he was the founder of a mighty nation; this is the epic not of an individual, but of a state'. The theme of the Aeneid is, then, two-fold; the glorification of a man and the glorification of a city-state.

The second, more abstract, part of Vergil's theme suggests in the first portion a deeper significance than lies on the surface. Why were the deeds of the Greek Aeneas chosen in preference to those of a Latin hero? Was it not that through Aeneas, the Greek, might be proven the right of the Roman city to the Greek heritage of literature and culture whose value was first fully appreciated in the first century B. C.? The deeds of the Greek Aeneas were made to foreshadow equally great exploits of the Roman ruler, Augustus, whose descent is so clearly traced to Aeneas in Aeneid 6.835.

This mingling, then, of the Greek and the Latin elements in due proportion was one of the problems that Vergil faced in writing the Aeneid. It was necessary for him to select from the mass of material at hand in both Greek and Roman literature, ritual, and legend what was adapted to his two-fold purpose.

Furthermore, in Homer prophecy plays a comparatively small part. Anthropomorphism is so pronounced that one feels equally at home with gods and men. Gods and goddesses hurry so easily to the aid of their mortal favorites that the need of formal go-betweens is hardly felt. In reading Homer one gets the same kind of impression that he receives from looking at Raphael's Transfiguration. One glance suffices to understand the earthly and the heavenly situation. Here you have the direct method. As Vergil studied his great prototypes, he must have realized that this method could not have been success-

<sup>1</sup>This paper was read at the Eleventh Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, held at the University of Pittsburgh, April 27, 1917.

fully applied to a poem like his own, that treated not of an individual, but of a nation evolved through a period of centuries. We find, then, the prophetic much more highly developed in the Aeneid. Cassandra, Helenus, Celaeno give their messages. When Vergil at last brings Aeneas to Italy, he has to select the prophetic figure that shall be instrumental in staging the finest prophetic scene and he finds this in the Cumaean Sibyl.

It would be interesting if we could discover how far the Sibyl had figured in the epic before the time of Vergil. She is not mentioned in the Iliad or in the Odyssey or in the extant fragments of the epics of Ennius and Naevius. It is, however, possible that either or both of these writers made her a prominent figure. In fact Varro, in the passage in which he enumerates the ten Sibyls of antiquity (apud Lactantium, Inst. 1.69) says *Quartam <Sibyllam fuisse> Cimmeriam in Italia quam Naevius in libris Belli Punici, Piso in Annalibus nominat*. This passage leaves us in doubt in what connection she appears in the *Bellum Punicum*. Vergil may have followed Naevius in introducing the Sibyl in the capacity of Aeneas's guide. Be that as it may, far stronger reasons existed in Vergil's time than in that of Naevius for assigning to her that duty.

If Vergil had considered Italian material before he made his choice, he could have found no prophetess of pure Latin origin available. Egeria, wife of Numa, Albunea, nymph of Tibur, and other prophesying nymphs were too limited in time and influence: while the Sibyl of Asia Minor and the priestess of Delphi belonged to a prehistoric past, the Latin nymphs who were believed to be endowed with the power of prophecy belonged almost to historic times. The greatest and earliest of these was Egeria, wife of Numa. The Roman lack of imaginative power is evidenced as clearly in Roman myths as in Roman literature. Hence Vergil could have used no purely Latin prophetess.

What, then, were the circumstances which rendered Vergil's choice of the Sibyl peculiarly happy?

Before this time the Sibyl was reputed to have evinced her interest in the greatness of the Julian line. In speaking of Julius Caesar, Suetonius says (Iulius 79):

"A report was very current that he had a design of withdrawing to Alexandria or Ilium, whither he proposed to drain Italy by new levies and to leave the government of the city to be administered by his friends. To this report it was added that in the next meeting of the Senate Lucius Cotta, one of the fifteen, had made a motion that, as there was in the Sibylline books a prophecy that the Parthians would never be subdued but by a king, Caesar should have that title conferred upon him".

This reputed oracle is also referred to by Cicero in the *De Divinatione*, which was published in 43 B. C.; hence the oracle must have been current before the writing of the Aeneid. It is quite possible that to Vergil, as he pondered the most striking way to lead

up to Anchises's revelation of the coming glory of the Julian line, the report of this oracle may have suggested the appropriateness of the Sibyl.

No doubt a better reason for her appearance lies in her close connection with the god Apollo. The fact that Claros, Delphi, and Delos all laid claim to a Sibyl of their own is significant, since each of these places is closely associated with Apollo. Indeed, wherever an abode of an early Sibyl is pointed out, there, too, is found Apollo's temple and to him the Sibyl's inspiration is always ascribed.

Suetonius (Augustus 92) tells us that Augustus considered himself in a peculiar sense under the care of Apollo. This might seem to have been a mere impression on the part of Suetonius, arising largely from the prominence that Vergil himself gives to this god, but, if we examine facts in Augustus's reign, we can see that this partiality to Apollo was evident before the Aeneid was written. After the battle of Actium Augustus rebuilt the little temple of Apollo on the mainland near Actium, and consecrated there the naval trophies. In 36 B. C., he vowed the magnificent temple of Apollo on the Palatine, which was dedicated in 28 B. C. Preparations for the celebration of the Secular Games (17 B. C.) may have been on foot before Vergil's death. At these the honors were divided almost equally between Jupiter Capitolinus and Apollo Palatinus; it is interesting to note that the authority for their celebration was a Sibylline oracle. In Odes 1.2, published in 27 B. C., Horace, after recounting the horrors of the Civil Wars and the portents that accompanied them, prays for aid first to Apollo, then to Venus, then to Mars, then to Augustus (in the guise of Mercury) to save the Roman State. These divinities are the ones that Vergil makes prominent throughout the Aeneid and without doubt by both Horace and Vergil they were selected because each bore a special relation to the State. Mercury deigning to assume the form of the youthful Augustus is the divinely appointed leader of Rome under the protection of Mars, the father of Romulus, Venus, the mother of Aeneas, and Apollo, his own patron deity. In honor of Apollo, then, Augustus erected the temple on the Palatine with its noble marble portico, its priceless works of art, its libraries filled with the best in Greek and Roman literature, and over this presided the colossal statue of Apollo, beneath which were kept the Sibylline books. It is, therefore, natural that the exaltation of Apollo in the Aeneid carries with it the exaltation of the Sibyl.

At any rate it is Apollo that guides Aeneas from his home in the Troad to the land of Hesperia. Grynaean Apollo, that is, the Apollo of Asia Minor, so Aeneas tells Dido, has ordered Aeneas to seek great Italy (Aen. 4.346), and Apollo gives him explicit directions through the Pythia, through the Penates, through Helenus, and through Celaeno. This importance of the god and his messengers is of course

largely due to the fact that Apollo is the god of prophecy, but the pronounced emphasis laid upon the importance of the fulfillment of prophecy and hence upon such instruments of Apollo as the Sibyl may on the other hand be due to the fact that Apollo was the patron god of Augustus.

Another reason for introducing the Sibyl was the prominence which her ritual and prophecies had gained in the Roman State. Augustus showed decided disapproval of the practicing of new foreign rites in Rome, but those that he found fully established he encouraged as though native. The inculcation of reverence for the Sibyl is one of the earliest effects of the influence of Greek thought upon the Romans. Before the end of the kingdom, as legend says, in the reign of one of the Tarquins, this strange woman appeared in Rome with her books. The books finally purchased by the king became, as Firth, in his book, *Augustus*, styles them, "the Law and Prophets of Paganism". They were kept in the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, under the guardianship of a special board with two Greek interpreters. The fact that they were written in a foreign language and were under strict guardianship kept the common people from intimate acquaintance with them; further, they could be consulted only by decree of the Senate and for State purposes.

In this respect they offered a marked contrast to the oracles delivered at Delphi, where State and individuals resorted to receive guidance. Xenophon explains that he consulted the Delphic priestess as to the sacrifices he should offer in order to make the expedition with Cyrus in the safest possible manner. Socrates says that Chaerephon, going to Delphi, asked whether any one was wiser than Socrates and received a negative answer. We find no such personal answers by the Sibyl, but many accounts exist of the consultation of the Sibylline books in order to ward off danger from the State. Livy gives a number of instances of their use in quieting popular unrest. We may note two. In the winter of 218 B. C., during the Second Punic War, Livy says,

'At Rome, or in the neighborhood, many portents occurred that winter, or, as often happens when once men's minds are affected by religious fears, many were reported and thoughtlessly believed'.

After telling a number of these portents, he adds, 'As to the other portents, the College of the Ten was bidden to consult the sacred books'.

After giving details with regard to offerings, sacred feasts, and sacrifices, he says,

'These ceremonies and vows performed in obedience to the Sibylline books greatly relieved men's minds of their religious fears'.

After the battle of Trasimennus Quintus Fabius Maximus was appointed dictator. He convoked the Senate and proved to the senators that Flaminius had met with defeat on account of neglect of religious rights and auspices and that Heaven itself must be

asked how the anger of Heaven could be propitiated. Says Livy (22.9):

"He thus prevailed upon them to do what is scarcely ever done except when the most sinister marvels have been observed, to order the ten to consult the books of the Sibyl. They inspected the volumes of destiny".

This limitation to State purposes of the consultation of the Sibylline books, the formality attending such consultation, and the place of honor assigned them as a sanctuary worked strongly upon the popular imagination. When the books were destroyed at the burning of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in 83 B. C., fifteen men of high rank were sent to Cumae, Erythrae, and other cities that owned Sibylline collections, to make a new collection for Rome. This collection Tacitus (*Annales* 6.12) tells us was kept under the base of the statue of the Palatine Apollo, in gilded cases. Suetonius (*Augustus* 31) adds that Augustus put them there only after a strict examination to ascertain which were genuine.

Such instances point to the fact that a reverence for these books had long been purposely impressed upon the minds of the common people as a means of strengthening the power of the State. Augustus would have been foolish indeed not to recognize and utilize their significance. He did this fully, and Vergil in the incident under discussion lends his influence toward furthering this piece of statecraft on the part of the Emperor.

Again, the hero of the Aeneid and the Cumaean Sibyl claimed like origin. Roscher (*Lexikon*, s. v. *Sibylla*) says that according to some authorities Aeneas had his first conference with the Sibyl in Marpeessus in the Troad. Vergil, however, does not imply this. If we follow the line of reasoning laid down by Roscher, in all probability the belief in a Sibyl found its way from the East to Marpeessus in Asia Minor, then to Erythrae, which, as the Sibyl grew in importance and overshadowed Marpeessus, laid claim to being the native city of the Sibyl—an honor that in reality belonged to Marpeessus. Other places, Claros, Delphi, Cumae, realizing the prestige arising from the presence of the Sibyl, claimed, not that she had originated in them, but that in her wanderings she had visited them and had made her abode with them for a time. The truth probably is that from the original city collections of inspired sayings were sent to different places; this, we know, took place between Cumae and Rome. So we trace our Cumaean Sibyl back from Rome to Cumae, to Erythrae, to Marpeessus, which is practically Troy. Of the Sibyl of Marpeessus, who probably was in Vergil's mind as he wrote of the Cumaean Sibyl, many myths were spread abroad relating to Homer and the Trojan war. According to Pausanias (10.12.1), the Sibyl had prophesied that Helen should be born for the destruction of Asia and Europe and that Ilium on her account should be

conquered. She also explained the dream of Hecuba. She is confounded with Cassandra and is spoken of as *γυνή γαμετή* of Apollo. To one interested in the subject of the Sibyl, the connection between her home and that of Aeneas would be very suggestive.

The dramatic effect of introducing the Sibyl would appeal to Vergil as an artist. His method of describing her is picturesque and suggestive. Heraclitus, 500 B. C., makes the first reference to her (apud Plutarchum, Pyth. Orac. 6). The Sibyl is represented as prophesying *μαινομένη στόματι*. She is also of great antiquity. The expression *Σιβύλλης ἀρχαιότερος*, 'of greater antiquity than the Sibyl', became a proverb. So the date of her birth was placed in primeval times among the shadowy forms of the Greek heroes. Not only did she exist in prehistoric times, but also the weight of centuries had bowed her form and dwarfed her as one of great age and hence worthy of respect. The Sibyl of Erythrae was granted by Apollo as many years of life as she held grains of sand in her hand, provided she would not look again upon the soil of Erythrae. She went to Cumae and lived there many years, but died upon receipt of a letter from Erythrae bearing a chalk stamp. When this happened none can tell. Another legend states that the gift of immortality was hers and finally became as burdensome to her as it did to Tithonus, and that she pined away till only a voice remained of her earthly substance. This presumably had its being in a phial and when children asked her, 'What do you want?', the voice replied, 'I want to die'.

With such a background of myths Vergil places the Sibyl at the entrance to the lower world in an atmosphere of mystery. To the *μαινομένη στόματι* are added other signs of the inspiration of the god. Her hair is roughened, her breast heaves, her color changes, her stature surpasses that of human beings. She struggles with the divine power and finally speaks under its stress. We cannot glean from Vergil's description whether the Sibyl is young or old; she is rather ageless and the majesty of the superhuman is stamped upon her. She is a truly epic figure, from a dramatic point of view.

Such may have been some of the reasons that led Vergil to make use of the Sibyl as Aeneas's guide through the shadowy regions of the lower world. Once he accepted her, he adapted her to his purpose. In the first place he does not give her the name used of her by early Roman writers. The Greek historian Ephorus (407 B. C.) designated the country in the vicinity of Lake Avernus as the home of the Cimmerians of the Odyssey. A Sibyl known as the Cimmerian is referred to by Varro, following Naevius and the Annalists. In the *De Mirabilibus*, a treatise bearing the name of Aristotle but evidently not written before 240 B. C., is this statement:

They point out at Cumae a subterranean chamber where dwells the Cumaean Sibyl, who there renders her oracles. Some take her for the Sibyl of Erythrae.

Others, who live in Sicily, consider her as being of Cumae. Others still call her Melankraera. This last name of the Sibyl is known to Lycophron, who makes her originate on Mt. Ida.

Vergil, like this early Greek writer, calls his Sibyl the Cumaean Sibyl, and, like him, connects her with Troy. As the city of Cumae was founded in 1050 B. C., the belief in a Sibyl here, whether she was known by the name Cimmerian or Cumaean, is probably synchronous with the belief in those of Asia Minor. If Vergil had used the term Cimmerian, he would have made closer the bond between the Sibyl and her Greek past: by calling her Cumaean he emphasized the merging of the Greek past into the nation's present, since Cumae, which far antedated Rome, was looked upon almost in the light of an Italian city.

Again, in quoting the Sibyl's prophecy Vergil does not use the acrostic, the usual form for Sibylline oracles. This possibly is to be accounted for by the fact that in Aeneas's case the Sibyl departs from her usual custom of writing the prophecies on leaves and speaks them through her own lips. Another reason may be that the chief prophecies are uttered not by the Sibyl but by Anchises.

The usual function of the Sibyl was to give instructions as to what course the State should pursue in order that an undertaking might prosper or a portent might not prove of ill omen. Prayer and sacrifice accompanied the appeal to the Sibyl. Aeneas follows this course in seeking advice for the State he is to found. So far the treatment of the Sibyl has been in keeping with her usual character, but the duty of guide through the lower regions is, as far as we know, new to her. As a rule, too, in the Roman State the Sibyl was the court of last appeal in prophecy, but Vergil brings the climax in prophetic art when father Anchises reveals to Aeneas the list of Roman worthies. This may be justified by the dramatic effect gained, since in so doing the aged father, the object of Aeneas's truest devotion, is given prominence. But it has perhaps a wider significance. This epic has been telling the deeds of a hero who, while putting first his filial duties, became the founder of a great city-state. His greatness has foreshadowed that of Augustus, who made it his boast to follow the behests of his foster father and who extended his power to the Garamantes and the Indi. This was a notable opportunity for emphasizing the practical good that comes to a man from honoring his father, a pronouncedly Roman virtue. It would encourage the Romans to look upon the achievements of their past as due to piety and conservatism, which Augustus as *Pater Patriae* did his utmost to further.

In these few moments we have noticed the relation of the Cumaean Sibyl to the general plan of the Aeneid, showing that the Aeneid necessitates a more fully developed treatment of the prophetic than did the simple and direct Iliad and Odyssey. We have considered some of the factors that gave importance to

the Cumaean Sibyl in the time of Augustus and Vergil's adoption of the Sibyl. It would be exceedingly interesting to take other incidents used by Vergil, some wholly Greek, others Italian, others Greco-Italian, such as this case which we have specially studied, and to analyze as far as possible Vergil's reasons for using them and the methods he employs. Such study affords the best proof possible that, though Vergil imitated Homer in meter, in general structure of the narrative, in the use of many incidents closely modeled upon similar incidents in the Iliad and the Odyssey, he was himself a great artist in molding telling incidents from divers sources into a homogeneous whole.

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### REVIEWS

The Life of Saint Severinus, by Eugippius, translated by George W. Robinson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1914). 141 pages, with Map. \$1.50.

The first English translation of the Vita Sancti Severini merits a hearty welcome. Even aside from its primary interest and importance as a historical source for the sixth century, the Vita deserves perusal as the story of a remarkable life, told with unaffected charm by a loyal and devoted disciple.

The book under review consists of a preface (pages 7-10), table of contents (11), the translation (13-113), and an appendix (115-126) containing a list of editions and translations of the life, a Latin hymn in praise of St. Severinus, and a chronological table. There is an index of authors cited in the notes (which are comparatively few in number), and a general index.

As Mr. Robinson's translation is based on the text of Mommsen (Berlin, 1898), it is to be regretted that he does not retain Mommsen's section numbers as well as his division into chapters. Moreover, the typographical arrangement of the chapters as formally separate units (instead of the mere indication of chapter and section numbers in the margin) gives the biography a somewhat disjointed appearance, as of many disconnected anecdotes rather than a fairly continuous narrative. Again, in his references to the Getica of Jordanes the translator gives chapter numbers only, with loss of precision, especially in the case of long chapters.

The English version, on the whole, is precise and careful, and often felicitous. As examples of diction and phrasing adequate in sense and feeling to the original we may note the following: Ad Pasch. 5 Norici Ripensis, "Riverside Noricum"; 1.3 ecclesiae. . . custode, "sacristan"; 1.5 tanti, "how great a guest!"; 3.3 fame laborantibus, "the famine-stricken"; 5.2 non te itaque pigeat, "let it not irk thee"; 8.3 puerili motu concitus, "moved by childish curiosity"; 34.1 de longinquis regionibus, "from a far country"; 45.1

clauso oris sui ostio in cordis cubiculo, "behind the closed door of his mouth in the chamber of his heart".

Yet the version has some marked defects. In the first place, it somehow fails to reproduce the quaint and unstudied peculiar charm of Eugippius. The Vita Severini has an old-time simplicity, a kindly attitude, a flavor of scriptural reminiscence, and an air of wonder about it that are most difficult to put into modern English. These traits have made critics call the biography 'incomparable', and the utmost effort is needed to catch them and reproduce them in another language. Perhaps the task is impossible. Yet some failures in appreciation may properly be noted. These are of four sorts: loose paraphrasing, actual mistakes, over-modern renderings, and too archaic renderings.

(1) Of loose paraphrasing take the following instances: Ad Pasch. 4 ubi disciplinae nulla constructio, nullus grammatici culminis decor exstitit, "when a liberal education has not fashioned the work, nor literary training lent it elevation and elegance"; 10.1 cum suo persuasore captivus, "he and the layman were made captives"; 14.1 quidnam est quod facere voluistis, "why have ye done this?"; 43.2 filios suos adesse praecipiens et prophetae benedictionis affatibus singulos quosque remunerans mysteriorum arcana prodidit futurorum, "called unto his sons, and said: 'Gather yourselves together'; that he might tell them that which should befall them in the last days, and bless them every one according to his blessings".

(2) In some places the translator seems to have missed the force of the Latin: Ad Pasch. 6 quae quoniam fidelis portitor, filius vester Deogratias, optime novit, verbo commendavimus intimanda, sperantes nos baiuli nomen etiam de tui operis perfectione iugiter esse dicturos, "Since the trusty bearer, thy son Deogratias, best knows these, I have entrusted to him to communicate them to thee by word of mouth. And I hope that I may speedily be able yet again to call him bearer on the completion of thy work". Does not Eugippius mean that he hopes he may soon call out the bearer's name (Deo gratias!) as a pious ejaculation upon the completion of the work? In cap. 21 *de longinquo* is rendered by "some time before". The meaning is rather 'from a distance', for it is expressly stated (21.1) that Paulinus came *fama eius excurrente*, and moreover that he stayed only *aliquot diebus*. In cap. 35 *mox mirabiliter effectum iugiter orandi promeruit* is rendered by "thereupon he earned a wonderful power of endurance in prayer", but *mirabiliter* should be taken with the verb, 'miraculously obtained'. In 15.2 it is more natural to suppose that the flooring itself was washed away by the floods (*tabulata* means 'beams' or 'joists'), and to translate by 'now lay your floor over the beams', rather than by "let a pavement now be laid upon the boards". In 43.8 totumque corpus signo crucis extenta manu